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THE ART OF JEAN TIJOU

BY WALTER A. DYER

LIVING as we do in an age in which applied art of a reasonably high order is a common matter, when sculpture, mural decoration, ornamental metal work and other forms of decoration of considerable merit are to be seen in every public building of importance, and well-designed furniture and decorations are available for every home, we are likely to lose sight of the fact that these things are but the heritage of a bygone age, when master craftsmen, with meagre traditions and education and with more primitive tools than ours, created works of art and originated types of design which we so blithely borrow. For this is after all a machine-made age in which we live, and objects of art are so easily obtained that we are prone to lose our reverence for the sources of genius from which they sprang. It is difficult for us to visualize the painful processes by which a Benvenuto Cellini wrought his masterpieces.

When we look upon the wonderful wrought-iron work of the seventeenth century we forget that all these elaborate gates and balconies had to be wearily forged by hand, with a doubt as to whether so new a thing would be successful.

It is therefore perhaps not strange that the name of Jean Tijou has long remained unfamiliar to most of us, and that we have failed to know or appreciate the wonderful ironwork which he designed in England at the close of the seventeenth century.

Ironwork had not been one of England's great arts. It never reached a high point of merit until the period of revival beginning with the reign of Charles II—the Restoration. The vogue for it, however, increased during the reign of William and Mary, and continued through the Queen Anne and early Georgian periods. It was largely in the spirit of the French art of Louis XIV. Following the lead of Hampton Court, every important seat and mansion in England was adorned with magnificent forecourt and garden gates, screens and balustrades of hand-wrought iron, often painted blue or green and gilded. An unfettered expression of craftsmanship marked the period. It resulted, naturally, in a remarkable development in the art and skill of designers and smiths of whose personalities we know extraordinarily little. During the reign of James I the art of gardening and landscape architecture received attention which had hitherto been largely lacking in England, in spite of the early interest of Elizabeth's time. During the period of the Restoration there was a further revival of interest in gardening, with a demand for ornamental gates and fences and a consequent impulse given to the ironworker's craft.

Daniel Marot had designed the garden gates at the Château des Maisons near Paris, and his designs were published in 1658. English designers followed his lead. Charles II caused gardens to be laid out at St. James's, at Greenwich and Hampton Court, and many private gardens followed. In 1670 Sir Christopher Wren was called upon to repair the fences and make new gates for the royal parks, but his work in this field was of only moderate merit. However, as the demand for more elaborate work continued, taste improved. As a matter of fact neither Inigo Jones nor Wren had made use of much ironwork prior to Tijou's time. Apparently they did not foster the taste for it. What little work Wren did was very simple. The grilles for the cloisters of Trinity College, Cambridge, built by Wren in 1678, were his most noteworthy designs. They were executed by one Par-

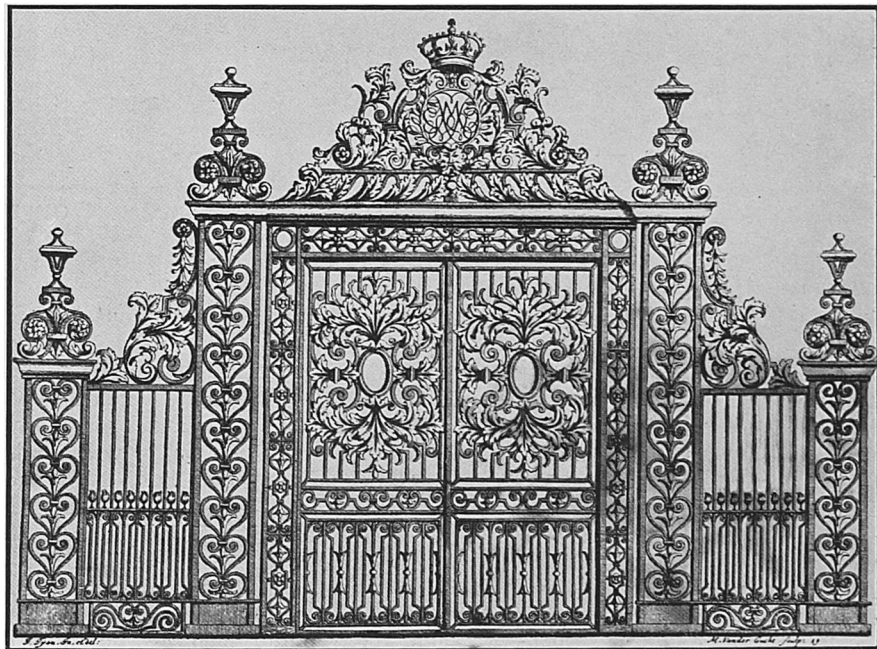


FIG. 1—DESIGN FOR GATES AND WICKETS, HAMPTON COURT PARK
From Tijou's "New Booke of Drawings"

tridge, who is known merely as a London smith. But fine work had been done in France for Louis XIV at the Palais Royal and a number of churches, and the desire in England for decorative work in the French manner became too strong to be resisted. Then came Jean Tijou, a Frenchman, to add a new expression to the rapidly developing art instinct of England. Most of the masters of applied art in England were native born, but two of them, Marot and Tijou, were Frenchmen who did their work under foreign auspices. Of Tijou we know amazingly little, considering his prominence at court. For some unknown reason Sir John Evelyn the diarist, who had not a little to say about Grinling Gibbons, does not mention Tijou. For the few data that have been gathered we are indebted largely to Mr. J. Starkie Gardner, Tijou's chief and almost his only biographer. We do not know the date or place of Tijou's birth, save that

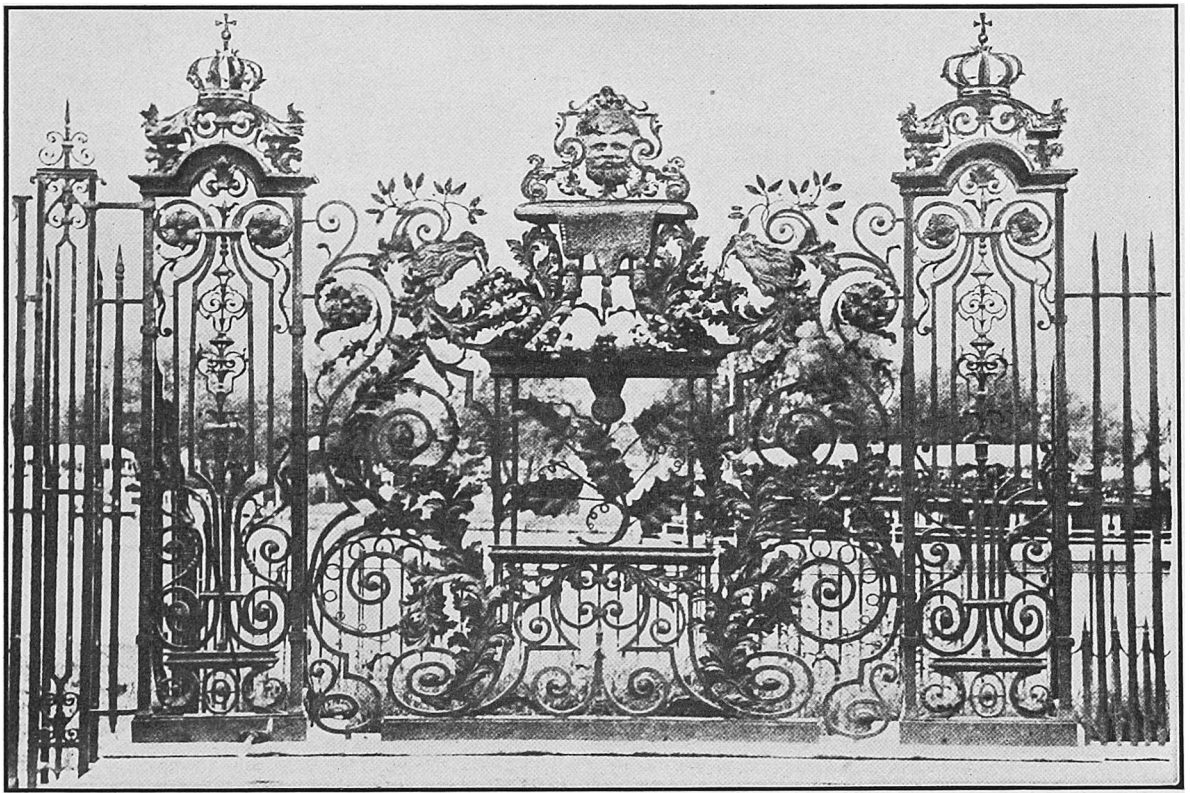


FIG. 2—ONE OF THE TWELVE PANELS IN THE SCREEN OF THE FOUNTAIN GARDEN HAMPTON COURT

BY JEAN TIJOU

it was in France, his residence in England, nor the date of his death or his place of burial. Nothing is known of his previous work in France or Holland, nor of the sources of his training. Nothing has been recorded regarding his family beyond the fact that he had a daughter who was married to a successful French artist in England, Louis Laguerre, at the Church of St. Martin's-in-the-Fields. It has been stated that Tijou, like Marot, was probably a French Protestant refugee to the Netherlands, who came to England in the train of William of Orange; but Mr. Gardner is inclined to doubt this. Laguerre was a Catholic who had been educated for the priesthood, and it is more likely that both men came from French Catholic families of the better class. Tijou may merely have migrated to England in search of broader opportunities. In any event, he was no novice when he reached London. This was at the beginning of the reign of William and Mary, by whom Wren was retained in the office of surveyor. Almost immediately we find Tijou at work on some of Wren's buildings.

Rumor has it that Tijou made his home somewhere in Soho, but he must have lived much of the time at Hampton Court. Part of the work for St. Paul's Cathedral was executed at Hampton Court and brought to London by water, though by 1699 the forging was evidently done at Piccadilly.

William of Orange ascended the English throne in 1689, and he and Queen Mary were Tijou's life-long patrons. Under their patronage he became England's greatest designer of richly wrought iron. As has been stated, nothing is known of Tijou's death. He seems to have disappeared from En-

gland about 1712. The last documentary evidence of his existence in the St. Paul's records is dated 1711. He is thought to have returned to France; but his name appears nowhere among the French designers or ironworkers and no trace or death, burial or will has been found. Such are the meagre details of the life of one who left a lasting impress on the art life of England.

Tijou himself was not a smith, but a designer and contractor for ironwork. The ironwork at Hampton Court Palace with few exceptions is the most famous in the world, and the best of it was designed by and executed for Tijou under the supervision of Sir Christopher Wren. Soon after the coming of William III Wren began his additions to Hampton Court, and within a year Tijou rendered a bill for six iron vanes "finely wrought in Leaves and Scroll worke" amounting to £80, and also for an iron balcony for the Water Gallery, which was taken down in 1701. In 1690 he rendered his second bill of £755 7s. for gates, pillars and panels for a screen encircling the Fountain Garden at Hampton Court. Tijou was, indeed, responsible for most of the exquisitely wrought iron gates and fences surrounding the private gardens of Hampton Court. In 1698 the Fountain Garden was redesigned and enlarged by Daniel Marot, and in 1699 this work was pushed. Tijou took the contract for a large amount of metal work; but it is probable that some of these later bills were never paid.

The screen around the Fountain Garden was one of Tijou's most noteworthy achievements. It eclipsed everything that had previously been done in this line in England. Nothing so extensive had

been done anywhere in Europe, and nothing in wrought-iron so rich and florid has been produced for any garden since. The screen or fence was ten feet high and included twelve strikingly bold, richly designed panels, all different in details but harmonious in general effect, separated by stately pilasters surmounted by royal crowns and buttressed by scroll-work supports. In the center of each panel was displayed a square, built about a rose, thistle, garter or some badge, emblem or cipher of the British royalty or nobility, supported by elaborate acanthus and scroll-work designs, intricate but perfectly balanced and harmoniously arranged. The acanthus designs and arabesques were in the most florid taste of Louis XIV, but the pilasters were dignified and English in spirit, expressing, perhaps, Wren's influence.

Other examples of Tijou's richest work were the three fine gates in the east or garden front of the palace, a pair of magnificent gates and wickets which separated the Long Walk from the Home Park, and a pair of gates, made in 1694-6, which still close the arched entrance to the Queen's side of the palace. The famous Lion Gates of Hampton Court are of the later period of George I and are inferior copies of Tijou's gates at the Long Walk. A plainer railing nearly 500 yards long, separating the gardens and the Park, was set up by Tijou in 1700. The picturesque railing of the garden terrace, with its simple but finely proportioned pilasters and panels, the balustrade with ovals at the head of the water features of the Park and the railing of the orangery—all were in Tijou's style and probably designed by him. He was also responsible for the variously designed stair-rails in the palace which ornamented the back stairs to the royal apartments, now used as private apartments. They were built about 1696. The King's staircase, painted by Verrio, and with a balustrade by Tijou, was completed in 1699.

The Hampton Court gardens were remodelled by George III and much of the ironwork was scattered. Some of it, fortunately, found its way to South Kensington and other museums, and some of it has since been restored. The ironwork at Hampton Court used to be attributed to Huntington Shaw of Nottingham; but that injustice has been rectified, though Shaw has a monument to his memory and Tijou has none. Probably Shaw was associated with Wren and Tijou as an executing smith on the work at Hampton Court, St. Paul's, and elsewhere.

Tijou designed iron gates for a number of private mansions in and about London and also for country estates, notably Carshalton in Surrey; Burleigh House near Stamford; Wimpole, the Earl of Radnor's seat in Cambridgeshire and Burley-on-the-Hill in Rutlandshire. The pair of gates at Eaton Hall, Chester, designed by Tijou, may have been brought thither from Hampton Court. The gates of the chapel at Bridewell, of the Clarendon Printing House and others have been attributed to him. About 1694 he designed a stair balustrade and balconies for Chatsworth, seat of the Duke of Devonshire. At Drayton House in Northamptonshire there is a quantity of fine ironwork that is supposed to have been designed by Tijou, though its authenticity is not certain. It was made to the order of the Baroness Mordaunt, later Duchess of

Norfolk, who married Sir John Germain and set up an elaborate establishment in 1700.

Next to Hampton Court, Tijou's most important work was done at St. Paul's. He was employed here for twenty years and he never worked to better purpose. For sheer beauty some of the ironwork at St. Paul's has never been surpassed. In discussing this work it must be borne in mind that Tijou was not a practical smith, but a designer. It is not known that he ever wielded the hammer. But he was also a contractor or directing master with skilled artisans working under him. Wren had charge of the work of St. Paul's and doubtless he was Tijou's superior, with power to approve or reject any of Tijou's work. For some reason, however, perhaps connected with court influence, Wren appears to have disturbed Tijou very little, so that one gains the impression that he worked almost independently. Nevertheless it is noticeable that Tijou's work at St. Paul's was more restrained than at Hampton Court, indicating that Wren found some way in which to make his influence felt. The progress of Tijou's work at St. Paul's can be traced in the official accounts in which he is usually referred to as "John Tijoue, smith." The first mention of his name in these documents appeared in 1691. In that year and in 1692 he executed some windows. These were not particularly ornamental. By 1696 he had done considerable fine work in the choir, including an iron screen under the organ case, now incorporated in the sanctuary screen. In 1699 he was paid £160 for a pair of gates with wickets at the west side of the south portico, which

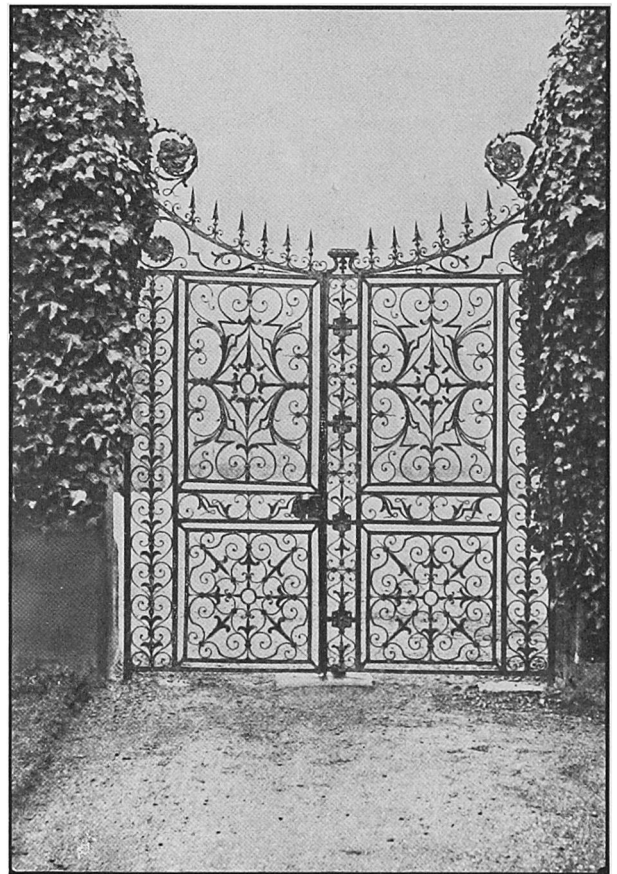


FIG. 3—GATES AT EATON HALL, CHESTER
Designed by Tijou and possibly brought from Hampton Court

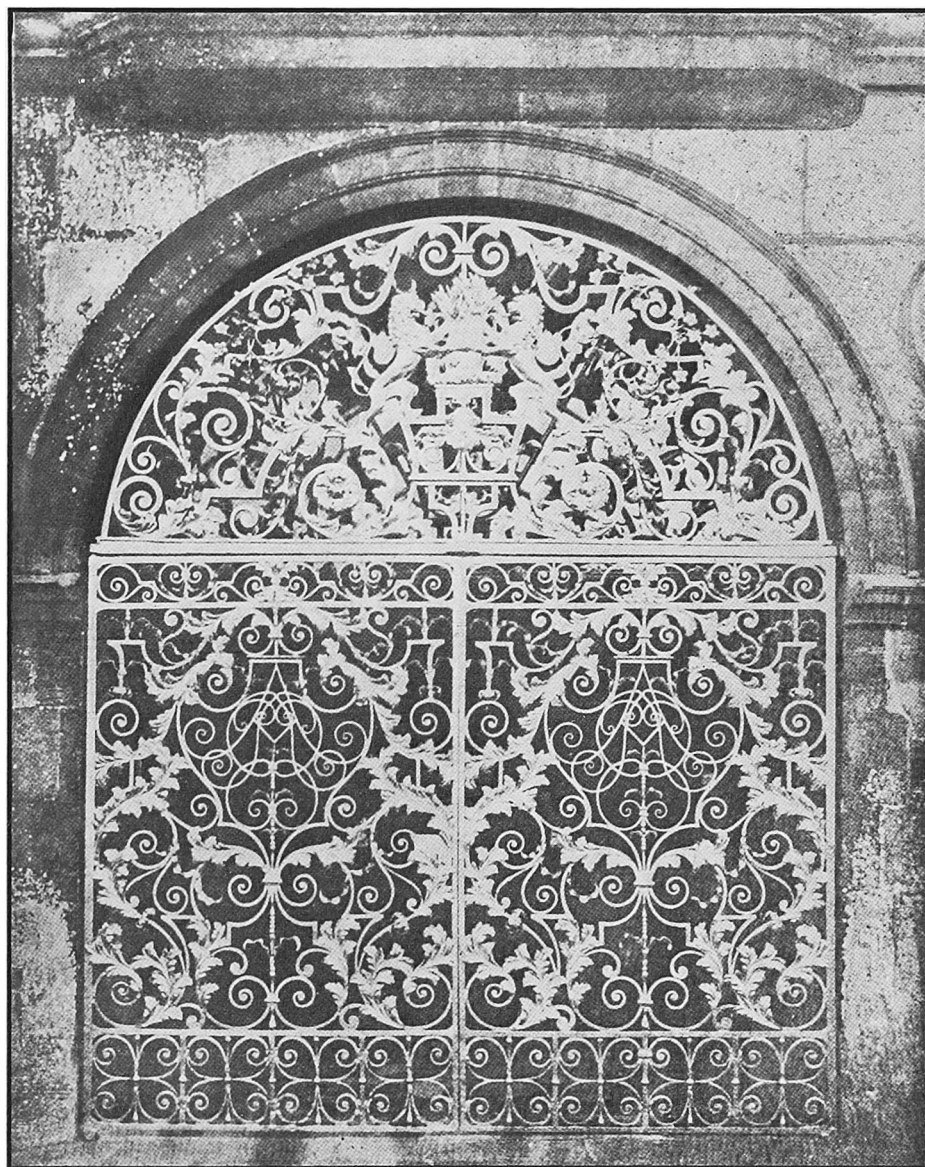


FIG. 4—ENTRANCE GATE TO BURLEIGH HOUSE NEAR STAMFORD, ENGLAND
BY JEAN TIJOU

are still in existence; and £265 for a range of desks for the choristers, which have since been destroyed. Particularly remarkable for their fine workmanship and graceful artistry were the gates at the ends of the choir isles and the altar rails, for which we find him credited with £540 and £260 respectively in 1705. Critics have pronounced this the finest ironwork, all things considered, in England. In 1706 he completed the ironwork of the round staircase in the southwest tower and various other work in and about the cathedral. The entries for his work continue up to 1711.

Tijou had numerous apprentices and helpers, and indeed founded a sort of school of ironwork design. Robert Bakewell of Derby, Roberts Brothers, William Edney of Bristol and other disciples of Tijou outside of London continued his style of work till after 1720. Among the smiths in London who worked on St. Paul's and who were undoubtedly men of rare skill were Partridge, Thomas Robinson, Thomas Coalburn, Warren and George Buncker. Robinson is known to have done some especially fine work, but on the whole we know very little

gave direction to a style which Tijou developed much farther. Tijou's book is now rare and very valuable.

Tijou's designs are beautiful as a whole and in detail. They are well balanced, symmetrical in every part, sectionally harmonious, minutely studied. They cover broad expanses with remarkable consistency; and weak spots are avoided. In technique and plan they should be an inspiration to modern decorative designers. Tijou's style, like that of Daniel Marot and Grinling Gibbons, was Italian by derivation, filtered through Spanish, French, Flemish and Dutch media. It showed the same tendency as they do toward the elaborate and florid, with a wealth of acanthus leaves, scroll work, draperies, rosettes, masks, eagles' and cocks' heads, heraldic emblems, figure work, etc. Like Gibbons he loved a lace-like pattern as well as a bold sweep of curve. He followed Marot in the use of monograms and ciphers of delicately interlaced openwork in place of heavy, solid shields. If Tijou lacked anything it was that sense of proportion and fitness, of restraint and classic feeling, that

about these men. Like Marot and other architects and designers of the period Tijou prepared and published for sale a book of designs. It is entitled "A New Booke of Drawings Invented and Desined by John Tijou," and it was published in London in 1693. It contained twenty plates, including designs of work planned for Hampton Court, Trinity College Library, Burleigh, Chatsworth and elsewhere. Some of these designs were modified more or less before being executed, and there were other designs in the book which probably were never executed. In fact some of them do not appear to be practicable. The designs are decidedly French in feeling, with the spirit of Louis XIV predominant. Marot's influence is evident. Tijou was naturally in sympathy with Marot's artistic creeds, and the latter was practically an arbiter of taste during the reign of William and Mary. At some time between 1686 and 1689 Marot had published in Holland a book containing six plates of ironwork designs, and Tijou's appear to have been based on these. Marot, however, only

guided Sir Christopher Wren. Had it not been for the steadying influence of Wren, the exuberance of Marot, Gibbons and Tijou might have swept England into such artistic extravagance and absurdities as marred the French style of Louis XV. However, Tijou's later designs showed more restraint, perhaps due to Wren's constant editing at St. Paul's, though he was never held back by the practical limitations of smithcraft. Though some of his designs were impossible of execution, in the main he forced the smiths to rise to meet his requirements.

in his memoirs or elsewhere, while he was not at all niggardly in his praise of Gibbons. Evelyn and other writers of the period frequently mention Gibbons and others; they pass over Tijou's name in silence. Tijou retained the favor of William and Mary, Queen Anne and George I, and he obtained plenty of private commissions for work. Apparently he was no social outlaw. The matter is inexplicable, but the fact remains that history has slighted him, and it is high time to make amends. For Tijou stands at the head of his craft among the creators of English styles. His designs

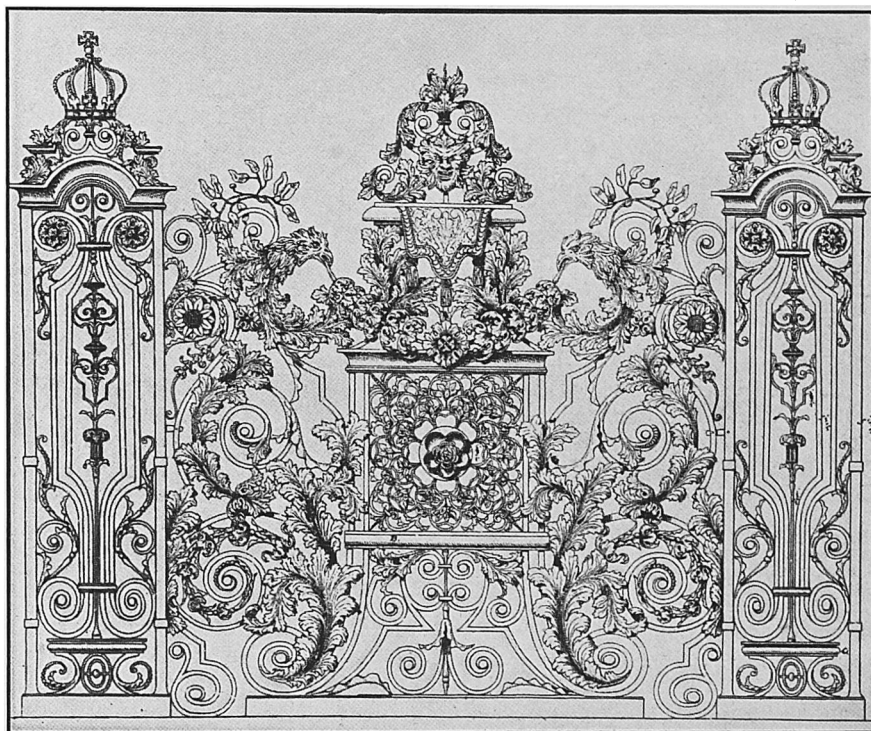


FIG. 5—DESIGN BY JEAN TIJOU FOR ONE OF THE TWELVE PANELS IN THE SCREEN OF THE FOUNTAIN GARDEN AT HAMPTON COURT

It is strange how little fame has been accorded Tijou and his work. It was Shaw and not Tijou whose statue was selected to represent English smithcraft on the façade of the Victoria and Albert Museum, and in other ways he has suffered injustice due to errors. But that hardly explains why Tijou's name should not be as well known as that of Grinling Gibbons, his contemporary and fellow worker under Wren, with whom he may be favorably compared as an artist. Mr. Bardner appears inclined to attribute the fact to a deliberate attempt on the part of Tijou's contemporaries to ignore him. Wren never mentioned Tijou once

for balustrades, balconies, screens, gates, staircases, railings, panels and smaller objects are conceded to be the finest examples of decorative ironwork in England. He exerted an immense and immediate effect on the craft, and it is not too much to say that his influence extended to other fields as well. Undoubtedly he shared with Gibbons an opportunity such as is given to few men, but he made the most of it. A clever draughtsman, a consummate artist in a difficult medium, with an extraordinary feeling for perfection of ornament, his name deserves to stand among those of the masters.

Walter A. Dyer

